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AUTHOR Shaughnessy, Michael F.; Marquez, Michelle
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ABSTRACT

The ability to speak in various public speaking situations is imperative for success in school, business, and industry. Aspects which improve public speaking skills include preparation, organization, paying attention to the "nuts and bolts" of the speaking situation, identifying the topic, using invigorating language, watching other public speakers, reading books on the topic, being energetic, using humor, keeping and maintaining the audience's attention, giving the right amount of information, using the voice well, using emphasis and visual aids, using good posture, assessing the scene, and using gestures. Also helpful are skills regarding talking to (not at) the audience, convincing them, dealing with problems, building rapport, using variety, dealing with interruptions or non-receptive audiences, asking for feedback from the audience, practicing the speech beforehand, organizing the notes, and dealing with questions. (SR)

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Thirty Days and Thirty Ways Towards Better Public Speaking

Michael F. Shaughnessy

Michelle Marquez

Eastern New Mexico University

Psychology Department

Portales, New Mexico 88130

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Abstract

The ability to speak/communicate and present oneself in various public speaking situations is imperative for success today in schools, business, and industry. This paper presents some skills which will facilitate positive public speaking, lecturing, presenting, and discussion skills.

Being asked to speak in front of a group, a classroom, or an organization may strike fear into the hearts of many. Often people are shy, timid and fearful. Some people are confident but lack the skills to present a truly possible well rounded speech or presentation. Public speaking skill is critical for success in a variety of endeavors-from teaching to sales to business and industry. This paper will attempt to focus on a variety of skills and tactics to improve one's speaking and communication skills. Obviously, practice is imperative. One may have good skills, but unless they are utilized they may never improve. This paper presents 30 aspects of relevance to public speaking and endeavors to prepare you to speak better in one month.

1. Preparation--In order to speak in public, one must first prepare. There are a number of elements to prepare however. These are:

    1. One's confidence
    2. One's appearance
    3. One's actual speech
    4. One's voice
    5. One's dress

In terms of confidence, practice and repetition are key elements. The more one practices and achieves success, the more one will increase one's confidence. Repetition insures success in that "practice makes perfect."

One's appearance is critical in today's society. Since we are very much a visually oriented TV nation, we must project our personality. One's hair, face, glasses, and bodily posture all bear examination and rectification if necessary.

Your speech or presentation needs preparation. There are very few people who can simply "wing it." Most of us need to write, re-write, polish, and edit our speech or presentation.

Our voice communicates our ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. Some of us have a good public speaking voice. Others need projection and diction lessons. You must self evaluate your tone, nasality, pitch, and other elements of your speaking voice and take corrective measures.

Lastly, one's dress communicates your preparedness, expertise, and projects your image. One must "dress for success" and be appropriately attired for the occasion.

2. Organization--You must first think clearly in order to write a good speech or to conduct a polished presentation. Then, you must write or at least outline your thoughts so as to present them well. Lastly, you must present them in a clean succinct fashion. The basic principle here is to focus on what you want to communicate, then deliver your message, then reiterate or repeat what you have communicated.

3. Examine--Their are a few points to be examined regarding your presentation. Let's put them in question format:

1. What is your purpose in giving this speech or presentation.
2. What is your key point?
3. What may you be presuming?
4. How will you present your key elements?
5. How will you persuade your audience?

4. "Nuts and Bolts"--There are some basic elements which need to be addressed regarding every speech. If overlooked they tend to cause nervousness and anxiety. Before speaking, find out:
   1. How long do they want you to speak?
   2. Who will be introducing you?
   3. What kind of audience will you be speaking to?
   4. When should you be there?
   5. Why am I speaking on this particular topic?
   6. Where is my audience? (In terms of age, sex, political affiliation, education, economics, receptiveness, etc.)
   7. What's in it for me? (Will I be paid? Will this enhance my career, business?)
5. Identify--Finding an interesting informative topic and identifying a specific area of interest to speak on is often difficult. The library is usually a good source of ideas, data, facts, figures, and information. Finding out what

your audiences is interested in may also be helpful--policemen and teachers are two quite desperate groups.

6. Invigorate--Your language and vocabulary must make your audiences sit up, take notice, and listen. Enthusiastic, compelling dynamic words should be employed. Positive, active, forceful language and evocative images should be employed. Good writers grab their readers by the throat. Good presenters often attack the jugular veins of the audience while still attending to subtle nuances of language. Develop your verbal skills, employ unforgettable images and work on developing your vocabulary.

7. Watching--If possible, watch other good public speakers, lecturers and supervisor teachers. Become a "master mime," in other words imitate the truly great speakers that you have seen. Tape and listen to good presentations and utilize the tactics, techniques, and strategies that you have found useful or helpful.

8. Read--Good books on public speaking <u>are</u> available. Instead of taking a class, there are a number of good books to help prepare you in the fine art of public speaking. Ed McMahon (1986), Johnny Carson's sidekick, has an excellent book on the art of public speaking. John Osborne (1990) has an excellent primer for executive and business folk. Michael

Thomselt (1989) offers an indepth analysis of business speaking and the skills involved.

9. Energy--Invariably a dynamic energetic, passionate speaker will capture their audience through their enthusiasm, vim, vigor, and vitality. Cold dead fish on the other hand leave the audience bored, and restless. As Tug McGraw of The New York Mets used to say "Ya Gotta Believe." Indeed speakers must believe in what they are going to say, must say it forcefully and convey that information in a sincere, convincing, show stopping fashion.

10. Humor--Often good presentations or speeches are laced with jokes, stories, or funny anecdotes. A good joke can help establish rapport with your audience. On the other hand a poor joke can insult people or cause resentment. Opening lines can set a certain climate and tone of your speech, so therefore beginnings must be carefully chosen. One must carefully discern what type of jokes, stories will go over well at the local Lions Club, Optimists group, or Shriners. Racial jokes, slurs, and the like are always in poor taste and should not be used.

11. Amount--The sheer amount of information and data in our society is staggering. Too often, presenters flood their audience with an avalanche of facts, figures, details, and trivia. This overwhelms them and often alienates listeners.

Basically, if you can communicate about five to seven main points or ideas, you have succeeded. Keep your sentences short, succinct, concise, brief, and to the point. Overly long run-on sentences or phrases "lose" your audience.

12. Attention--Procuring an audience's attention and maintaining it, is no easy task. Before beginning a presentation scan your audience, look around, establish eye contact, take a look at the people you are going to be spending the next 30 to 45 minutes with. If there are several people chattering, clear your throat in an attempt to begin. When you have your audience's rapt attention, then you can begin.

    Maintaining your audience's attention is another matter. Let's face it--we all have lapses. We must work to minimize our lapses--and present a polished entertaining, informative talk. With each speech we make, we must work toward being perceptive of our own weaknesses and rectifying and remediating them. Feedback from friends and associates may offer insight as to when we hit a valley or when we have lost our audience. The facial expressions and body language of our audience may also give us some feedback so as to modify parts of our presentation.

13. Vocal--Your voice is your most potent weapon. There are various aspects to your voice which should be examined, and worked on, if need be. These are:

1. Quality - Is your voice pleasant? Do people make positive remarks about it? Have you heard your own voice on tape? Do you listen to yourself as you speak?
2. Pace - Do you speak too quickly or too slowly? Has your pace been described as a "machine gun" rapid fire approach? Or as a slowly moving ambulatory mound of jello-in a quivering, shaking fashion? Sometimes nervousness does come through in a presentation--and is reflected in one's speech.
3. Volume - My booming cannon like voice has been described as "overwhelming and intimidating," so I make a conscious effort to "tone it down." On the other hand nothing is more frustrating than being unable to hear a milkshop-like mild mannered willo' the wisp. Ideally one should vary one's presentation, modulating where appropriate with forcefulness and retreating for effect.
4. Pauses - A few brief seconds allows the audience to think about and assimilate what they have heard. It allows the speaker to catch their breath and creates a dramatic effect. Well, ah even Ronald Reagan used the pause for effect. Remember his debate with Walter Mondale--and his exquisite timing as he said "Well

(pause) I'm not going to exploit (pause) for political purposes (pause) the ah, youth and inexperience of my opponent." This retort, in response to a question about Reagan's age was skillfully managed and veritably "turned the tide" of the campaign.

14. Emphasis--There will be certain specific points which you will want to heavily, forcefully, emphasize. This can be accomplished by a) slowing your pace, b) becoming louder, c) banging on the podium or d) all of the above. It is a clear, distinct, separate, aspect of your speech which you want to verbally underline so to speak. It is imperative, not crucial, that you master this strategy--either through verbal means or bodily posture and language.

15. Visual Aids--Increasingly, slides, overheads, and film strips are used to a) convey information, b) support one's position, c) give a visual image or d) all of the above. Visual aids can be used at the beginning of the presentation to act as an "advance organizer" and grab the attention of the audience-or-during the presentation itself to support your main contentions-or-in your summary conclusions section to link or tie your presentation together.

16. Posture--Your body language conveys about your confidence, your self-esteem and your belief in your own skills and abilities. In general, standing erect enhances your voice

and presentation. For longer (2 hour) presentations, sitting erect is acceptable, particularly when covering large amounts of material.

17. Assessing the Scene--The good speaker "sizes up" the room in which he/she will present. Some important variables to consider are:

    1. The presence or absence of a podium.
    2. The presence or absences of a microphone.
    3. The size of the room.
    4. The seating arrangement.
    5. The size of the audience.
    6. Distance of speaker from audience.
    7. Type of Audience, Males vs Females, Young vs Old, Republicans vs Democrats.

    Simply seeing the room in which one is going to speak has a calming relaxing effect on many. It also provides an opportunity to do some last minute changes and modifications in one's speech. One must be ready and prepared for any eventuality. Readjustments do often have to be made. Some speakers find it incredibly difficult to speak without a podium to hide behind. Others need a podium for their notes or index cards. Many prefer to use a microphone, still others like to project their voice around a large auditorium.

Drastic accommodations in one's own style may have to be made depending upon the size of the room and number of people in attendance. And sometimes even "the best laid plans of mice and men often go astray." On one occasion I visited a small classroom with a seating capacity of 30 in the morning. In the afternoon I learned I had been moved to a ballroom with a capacity of 300. Quite an adjustment.

18. Gestures--Pointing, gesticulating, using one's hands, fists, and arms and body movements can lead much to a speech. Gesturing can be used to emphasize a point or to reiterate an important aspect or element. Many years ago, Kruchev, the then leader of the Soviet Union allegedly banged his shoe on the podium--this was inappropriate. However, using one's hands, fingers, arms, and gesturing are important elements of one's delivery. Watch polished speakers use their hands--better yet turn off the sound on your TV and watch TV personalities use their hands, arms, fingers, and the wide repertoire at their disposal. Develop your own bag of gestural tricks.

19. Talking to; not at, the audience--A real skill is the ability to talk to one's audience instead of simply reading a prepared speech at them. One must enjoy talking to people and enjoy the interaction with them. Granted, until the question and answer session they may not be interacting

verbally with you, they may be giving you their full undivided attention. Some speakers pick out one person in the audience and speak directly to him/her--others choose an entire row and then generalize from that row. In any event, making an effort to communicate with your audience is imperative.

20. Convincing Your Audience--In certain instances your job will be to convince, cajole or persuade your audience. This is usually done in one of the three ways. You may appeal to the logic, reason, rationality, intellect, or cognitive powers. Secondly, one may appeal to their feelings, their emotions, the depth and breadth of their soul and the deep evocative varying affective realm. Lastly, your credibility as the speaker--backed perhaps by your academic credentials, education, experience, research or by your image as a concerned, sincere, believable, trustworthy loyal person of integrity. Very good speakers probably employ all three of these at one time or another.

21. Dealing with Problems--In spite of adequate preparation, things can go wrong. A light bulb can burn out, someone can fall asleep, microphone problems can occur, a fire alarm can go off--anything can happen. A touch of humor in these situations can help--an acknowledgement that "these things happen" can take the edge off a very tough embarrassing

situation. Your general demeanor in these situations means a great deal. Confront the problem head on and if the problem cannot be easily and readily solved, move on with decisiveness. Most audiences want you to do well and probably sympathize with your situation. You can use that to your advantage with a quip or comment.

22. Building Rapport--Forming a relationship with your audience and establishing and building rapport are critical components of public speaking especially impromptu speaking. There are basically six domains which may be employed to establish good will.

A. You--tell them something about you, your history, your background, your friends, interests, hobbies.

B. The audience--are they teachers, policemen, retired folk, a community service group?

C. The location--is it Nashville, Tennessee or Clovis, New Mexico? What is uniquely distinct about the area or location.

D. The occasion--are you discussing an event, a retirement, or a celebration.

E. The message--what are you supposed to say, discuss or elaborate on?

F. The weather or the news--global world events can be discussed or commented upon, as can the recent heat or

cold wave and the ramifications and repercussions thereof.

23. Variety--The old saying about variety being the spice of life is true--and it also helps pepper a speech. A monotonous boring speech bores people, puts them to sleep and often angers them. You have wasted their time. A laudable speech varies emotion, humor, information data, and presentation. Often speakers build to a crescendo--almost like a symphony. Other good speakers play their audience almost as a conductor drives, entices, cajoles, and pleads with his orchestra. Variety is the key--some long phrases--some short phrases. A few complex challenging issues--a few short, terse, concise, succinct sentences. Perhaps a pun or joke here--a serious aside there, and the entire thing must be integrated and synthesized and if possible summarized.

24. Dealing with interruptions--some participants--the audience will often interrupt, question, probe, or shout out comments. The speaker must deal effectively with such interruptions, indicating that there will be time at the end of the lecture for questions. Hecklers, loud boisterous complainers should be prepared to ask their questions at the given time.

25. Dealing with non-receptive audiences. Often in spite of one's best efforts and endeavors to present an interesting,

dynamic speech one's audience is simply not receptive. One must make an attempt to continue to be enthusiastic and finish the speech.

26. Asking for feedback from your audience. During the speech or at the end, the speaker will ask for feedback from the audience. This helps the speaker know that the message is being seen, heard, or understood. It also lets the speaker know what needs to be done during the remainder of the speech to capture the audience's attention and to clarify misunderstood concepts and ideas.

27. Practice your speech and watch yourself on video. It is a good idea to practice your speech and record it on video. The video will help you see what mistakes are being made. The video does not lie. It also shows you your posture, hand motions, tone of voice, and eye contact with the audience.

28. Organizing your notes--If a podium is available, one might want to make an outline of the speech and keep it on the podium. An outline is often helpful to the speaker, it keeps the speaker on the subject being presented. Another way to make an outline is on index cards. The cards are small and can be numbered which can be very helpful if they are dropped.

29. Dealing with questions--some speakers allow time at the end of their presentation for questions from the audience. Questions can be problematic if you don't know the answers or if the prober continues to badger, attack, or challenge you. First, try to keep answers brief--long winded responses tend to dull the mood and you lose momentum. Sincerely offer to discuss the question at a later, mutually convenient time. If you don't have an answer, offer to look it up and get back to the person; Have a supply of your business cards on hand. There are probably a few good "Dont's" to remember.

    1. Don't lose your temper!
    2. Don't lie
    3. Don't let yourself be rushed, pushed, or hurried.
    4. Don't let people put words into your mouth.
    5. Don't get into a debate with one lunatic or maniac. You are there for the entire audience.

30. For further Reading--In order to really improve your public speaking skills, further reading is crucial. The following books are excellent sources to really help you "fine tune" and polish your skills to a high degree of proficiency.

    1. Berg, Karen and Gilman, Drew. (1989). Get to the Point. Bantam.

2. Burger, Chester. (1975). How to Meet the Press. Harvard Business Review.

3. Clevenges, Theodore. (1966). Audience Analysis. Bobbs.

4. Gordin, William R. and Mammen, Edward W. (1981). The Art of Speaking Made Simple. Doubleday & Company, Inc.

5. Howell, William S. and Ernest, Bormann G. (1971). Presentational Speaking for Business and the Professional Harper & Row.

6. Jay, Anthony. (1971). The New Oratory. American Management Associations.

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